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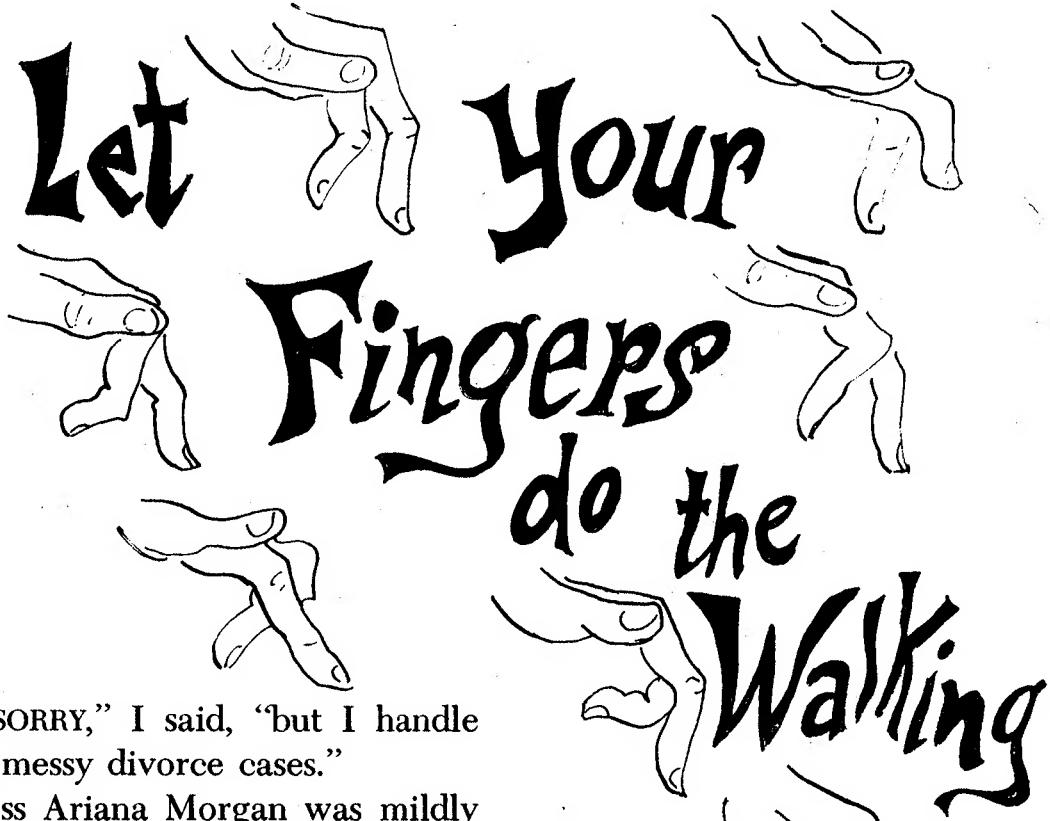
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Though the telephone saves much time and effort, there are times when it undeniably becomes a barrier.



LET YOUR FINGERS DO THE WALKING

"I'M SORRY," I said, "but I handle only messy divorce cases."

Miss Ariana Morgan was mildly puzzled. "I thought that private detectives took just about anything that came their way."

"In the old days, perhaps, but this is the age of specialization." I smiled tolerantly. "Now, why don't you simply go to the police and ask them to find your uncle? They have all kinds of personnel and facilities and webs of communication. I am just one very limited individual."

She had violet eyes. "My uncle

A Novelette
by
Jack Ritchie

would never forgive me if I made such a big thing out of this. Going to the police and all." And she smiled beautifully. "I have good reason to believe that he is somewhere here in this city."

Assuming that I took her case, which I had no intention of doing, that narrowed the area of search considerably.

"I must ask one obvious question," I said. "Why don't you consult the telephone or city directories?"

"I did, but he isn't listed. He must have changed his name."

"Why would he do that?"

"He never did really like it. He was always talking about changing it."

I didn't buy that at all. "What was his name before he disappeared?"

"Charles Harlan. He's my mother's brother."

"What makes you think he's here?"

"The last three years his Christmas cards to me and Mother have been postmarked from this city. No return address, just the postmark."

"How did this all start?"

"It was a family quarrel," she said. "Father and Uncle Charles just couldn't get along. Finally, three and a half years ago, there was a blowup and Uncle Charles left. We haven't heard from him since then,

except for the Christmas cards."

"Do you have one of them with you? Or at least the envelope?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm not really the sentimental type. I throw things like that away after a week or two."

"There's been no other communication with your uncle?"

"None. I think he sends the Christmas cards mainly to let us know he's all right and not to worry."

My phone rang. It was Mrs. Finley and she was agitated. "Do I have to stay in the motel alone with him *all* night?"

"Now, Mrs. Finley, it's perfectly safe. He's a graduate student of the highest moral caliber. He'll probably spend the night working on his Ph.D. Or, if you wish, he could bring along some cards?"

"Can't we just *say* that I spent the night with him and let it go at that?"

"My dear Mrs. Finley, we must go through the *form* of the thing to prevent possible perjury later."

She was silent for a few moments. "Won't the judge ask *specific* questions about what happened in the motel?"

"You have absolutely nothing to worry about. Our judges are wise and experienced men who do not probe where probing is superfluous. Everyone will be satisfied with the basic fact that you spent

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the night with a man other than your husband. What actually did or did not happen is immaterial."

I hung up and spoke to Ariana Morgan. "The divorce laws in our state are rather strict. Adultery is one of the easier ways out."

She opened her purse and took out her checkbook. "I'll pay something in advance. Say five hundred dollars?"

I rubbed the back of my neck as I realized that I didn't really want to say good-bye to her. "I haven't said that I'd take the case."

"But you will, won't you?"

I sighed and took a blank sheet of paper from my desk drawer. I wrote *Ariana Morgan* on the top of it. "Your address, please?"

"That won't be necessary. I'll keep in touch with you daily." She opened the checkbook and stared at it thoughtfully, then she quickly closed it. "On second thought, perhaps you would prefer cash?"

"No need to go through that trouble. A check will do nicely."

"No," she said firmly. "I'm certain you *must* prefer cash. I'll bring the money in later this afternoon."

I glanced at my watch. "I'd like to ask you a few more questions, but would you please excuse me for a moment? I've got to deliver some papers to Mrs. Finley's lawyer before three o'clock. He has an office just down the corridor." I took a

folder out of a desk drawer. "I shouldn't be more than ten minutes."

I left the office, walked down the corridor, and turned a corner. I looked back to see if by some chance Ariana had decided to follow me.

She hadn't.

I went on to the door marked *Morris Willman, Confidential Investigations*. Our professional interests are somewhat parallel and I have subcontracted him a number of times.

I found him on the phone and waited until he was through.

"Morris," I said. "In a little while a girl with honest violet eyes will come out of my office. She says her name is Ariana Morgan, but I don't quite believe that."

"Why not?"

"She's coy about giving me her address. Also, just as she was about to write out a check, she suddenly changed her mind and insisted that she would get me cash instead. I think it was because she suddenly realized that her real name was printed on the personal check and she didn't want me to know what it is."

Morris is a thickset man with sandy hair. "I'm supposed to find out what her real name is?"

"Yes. I think she'll be going from my office direct to a bank to cash a

check for me. You know the rest."

Morris nodded. "And at the bank I fall into line behind her and look over her shoulder or something while she cashes her check?"

"Or something. But get her name."

He reached into his desk. "I'll put on my tailing disguise."

Morris' disguise consists of black shell-rimmed glasses and a briefcase. Women do not expect to be followed by spectacled men carrying briefcases.

He adjusted the windowpane glasses. "Why would she make her divorce difficult by giving you a phony name?"

I felt a bit uncomfortable. "This isn't a divorce case. I'm supposed to find a missing person."

He stared at me. "Oh, come now."

"It's a new challenge," I said firmly. "Besides, the pay is good."

I returned to my office and smiled at Ariana. "You'll have to tell me more about your uncle, his age and so forth. And naturally you have a picture of him?"

She reached into the purse again and brought out a snapshot. "Uncle Charley is about fifty."

I studied the photograph. It showed a smiling broad-shouldered man. Even in black and white, I thought I caught the hint of secret humor about the eyes. I looked up.

"You don't happen to have his Social Security number?"

She blinked. "His Social Security number?"

"Yes. If I had it I could check with the Social Security office and find out if his number is still active and if it is, where its contributions are coming from."

She shook her head. "I'm sorry, but I don't know the number."

"What was your uncle's line of work?"

She smiled ever so slightly for a moment. "He was a salesman."

"For what firm?"

"I don't remember. He traveled most of the time and changed jobs fairly often."

"Did your uncle have any hobbies?"

"Hobbies?"

"Yes. I'm just trying to round out the picture. It helps to know what kind of a man I'm looking for."

She thought that over. "Well, he did go in pretty strong for archery. Got rather good at it. As a matter of fact, he had all kinds of cups and trophies. Was even runner-up in the state tournament several times."

"What state was that?"

Her eyes flickered. "I really don't remember. As I said, he traveled quite a lot and picked up the cups here and there." She consulted her watch. "I'd better get that cash be-

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When she was gone, my phone rang. It was Mrs. Finley again. "You said he was a *student*? Isn't that kind of young? I mean things will be bad enough without people accusing me of robbing the cradle."

"He's about twenty-eight."

She was silent for a few moments. "That isn't too bad. I'm nearly that myself."

According to her husband, she was thirty-six.

"How did a graduate student ever get into this line of work?"

"Money," I said. "All graduate students need money, and they volunteer for the damnedest things."

"Won't this ruin his reputation?"

"No one will ever really know who he is. We are simply following the requirements of divorce law by providing a stranger to spend the night with you."

She sighed. "Why couldn't Edgar be the one who spends the night with somebody? It would certainly be the gentlemanly thing to do."

"Perhaps, but the divorce was your idea. He consented to go along with it only if *you* bore the onus. Also, remember that this is the only way he'll let you have half of the community property without a long court battle—and in these long, expensive court battles, you know who's the only one who really bene-

fits from those, Mrs. Finley?"

She knew. "All right. I'll go through with it."

My phone rang ten minutes later and this time it was Morris Willman. "According to her checks, her name is Ariana Collier, one-one-five Riverland Road, St. Paul. That's quite a piece from here."

"Morris," I said, "she'll be coming back here. When she leaves again, I want you to follow her and find out where she's staying."

When Ariana reentered my office, she handed me five one-hundred-dollar bills.

I pocketed the money. "I forgot to ask why you wanted to see your uncle again."

"Why? Well . . . my father isn't angry with him anymore."

"But is Uncle Charles in a forgiving mood? After all, it takes two to make an argument. Suppose he still doesn't want to see your father?"

"Never mind about that. Just find Uncle Charles."

"And tell him all is forgiven?"

She hesitated. "No. I'd rather you didn't speak to him at all. Just let me know where he's staying."

"Why isn't your father here instead of you? After all, it was *his* argument."

"He's rather busy just now. We thought it would be best that I come here."

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that your father's name was?"
"Hector."

"Hector what?"

"Hector . . ." She caught herself in time. "Hector *Morgan*, of course."

I could have asked her more questions, but there were a few things I wanted to know first. I smiled. "I'll see what I can do with what you've given me. I'll see you tomorrow, of course?"

Morris phoned fifteen minutes after she left. "She has a suite at the Stanton Arms. Number three-two-four. It's about the best the hotel can provide."

When Morris hung up, I got the long-distance operator. "I'd like to speak to any one of the Colliers at one-one-five Riverland Road, St. Paul, Minnesota. I'm sorry, but I lost the number."

After a while the connection was made and a man answered, "The Collier residence."

Residence? And that would be Jeeves or Meadows? I thought I'd cross-check first. "Could I speak to Ariana, please?"

"I'm sorry, but she isn't in."

"Where could I reach her?"

"I believe she's out of town at present. Would you care to leave a message?"

"No," I said. "In that case, I'd like to speak to her father."

There was a pause. "I'm afraid

that's impossible, sir. Mr. Collier died some six years ago."

I thought I might as well go whole hog. "Is his brother Charles around there? I'm told I could reach him there."

The voice was cold. "We have not seen or heard from him in over three years."

"Oh," I said and hung up.

I reached for the white-page volume of our local phone directory. I found Archery Club, 2385 Windom Ave. and dialed its phone number.

A woman answered with a simple "Hello?"

"Archery Club?" I asked a bit dubiously.

"That would be my husband. He's president of the club, but he's still at work now. He won't be home until five-thirty."

"I wonder if I could talk to him sometime this evening? It concerns the Archery Club."

"Oh, sure," she said. "Drop in any time."

After supper, I drove to 2385 Windom Avenue. It was quite an agreeable neighborhood and I placed the residents in the doctor-lawyer-engineer class.

I rang the bell at 2385 Windom.

The door was opened almost immediately by a suntanned man in his early forties. He smiled hospitably and shook hands. "My name is Simpson. Albert Simpson."

I gave him a name I used on occasion. "James Rawlins. I'm a freelance writer. I'm doing an article on archery in this area and I thought the first thing I ought to do is see the president of our local Archery Club."

Simpson was quite pleased. "I'll be happy to do anything that will help."

His wife appeared. She was perhaps five years younger than her husband. Two early-teen-age girls peeked into the livingroom from the far doorway.

Simpson noticed them with obvious pride. "Yes, sir, there's nothing like archery to keep the family together." He gave the statement a moment's thought. "Though, in all fairness, I suppose the same could be said for skiing, camping, snowmobiling, touch football—"

His wife interrupted. "Would you care for something to drink, Mr. Rawlins? I made some strawberry-pineapple punch."

Simpson raised a hand. "Perhaps Mr. Rawlins would prefer something stronger? I believe we still have some apricot brandy."

"Strawberry-pineapple punch will be just fine," I said quickly.

Mrs. Simpson brought out the punch.

"Are you an archer?" Simpson asked me.

"Not really, though I have shot

off an arrow now and then. But I've always been interested in the subject."

Then I let him talk about archery for twenty minutes while I sipped punch. Finally I said, "You don't by any chance have lists of the winners of our regional tournaments?"

He nodded enthusiastically. "That's what the club's for. We organize and promote contests and otherwise encourage people. Why don't we all go down to my office in the basement? It's headquarters for the club."

His wife followed us. "Albert's been reelected president of the club for seven consecutive terms. He's really quite popular."

Albert blushed slightly.

Downstairs, the recreation room walls were liberally adorned with bows, arrows, quivers, and even targets. A long glass case against one wall was completely occupied with presentation cups, badges, ribbons and sashes.

"We hold our monthly meetings down here during the winter months," Simpson said. He led us on to a smaller room which was fitted with office furniture, including filing cabinets and metal shelves.

"Is this a full-time job?" I asked.

"In a way it is. Takes almost all of my spare time. But I'm really in the construction business." He went to one of the filing cabinets. "You

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wanted a list of the state title winners?"

"Actually I'm more interested in regional winners."

It was my theory that a man might choose to disappear and perhaps change his name, but most likely he would not change his interests. If Uncle Charles were as good with the bow and arrow as Ariana claimed, it was a good bet that he would continue with his hobby, and that entailed entering contests.

I thought it more likely that I'd strike pay dirt by studying the regional winners than the state champions. Uncle Charley might have been a whiz in Minnesota, but competition in this state might be stiffer. His name, whatever it was now, was more likely to appear in the winners' columns of the regional tournaments than in the state meets.

Simpson brought over some folders and handed them to me. "Our state is divided into six districts and we're in the fifth. As you can see, we hold a number of tournaments, especially during the warm months, covering a variety of classes and flights."

"Albert is a purist," Mrs. Simpson said. "He doesn't use sights on his bow, and he's strictly a target-shooter. He doesn't go hunting and he won't even shoot at targets that

are silhouettes of real animals."

Albert nodded. "I don't particularly approve of flight shooting either. Just a question of strength of back and bow. It just isn't archery."

I nodded sympathetically. "Personally I've always detested clout shooting. It doesn't belong on the same field with the true bow and the stout shaft."

We blended as Little John and Robin Hood. "Myra," he said, "get the apricot brandy."

Her eyes clouded. "I don't remember exactly where I . . ."

They excused themselves and left together to find the brandy.

While they were gone, I went over the names of the regional winners in the Open and Senior divisions for the last three years. I made a list of all the names which appeared more than once. It seemed to me that if Uncle Charles was as good a Bowman as his collection of trophies indicated, his present name was bound to be repeated. I copied six names that filled that condition.

It was also obvious that Uncle Charles couldn't have won any tournaments going back more than three years, since he wasn't here. I was able to cross four of the names off my list by going back six years and finding them repeated.

That left me with just two names of repeat winners in the last three years only: Hiram Brackish

and plain old Thomas G. Carson.

Ordinarily I could not conceive of anyone changing his name to Hiram Brackish; however, we live in the world of Engelbert Humperdinck and one can no longer be positive of anything.

Simpson and his wife returned with the apricot brandy.

"It was on the top shelf of the kitchen cabinet," Simpson said. "I remember that I wanted to keep it out of the reach of innocent children."

Mrs. Simpson carried an egg cup which she used to measure brandy into our punch glasses.

I glanced at the sheets I held. "Hiram Brackish seems to be quite a winner."

Simpson agreed. "Young fellow of about twenty-five. Just graduated from law school."

That eliminated Hiram.

I sipped my brandy. "The name Thomas G. Carson seems to ring a bell. In his early fifties, isn't he? Slightly graying?"

"About fifty and graying," Simpson agreed. "Has a beard. Moved here some three years ago. Don't know exactly from where."

"He's a salesman, isn't he?"

"No," Simpson said. "A veterinarian."

Mrs. Simpson stepped in. "Not actually a veterinarian. He just works for one. The Danvers Cat

and Dog Hospital, I believe."

"Does he come to your meetings?"

"Never misses a one," Simpson said. "Very personable and a real archery buff. There's even talk about running him for vice-president next year."

Simpson went back to the filing cabinet and removed another folder. He leafed through what appeared to be a collection of newspaper clippings. "Here's a photo of Brackish when he won the Spring Event in the instinctive open." He frowned. "Doesn't seem to be any picture of Carson, though. Rather a shame. He's really the outstanding bowman in the club. I've been trying to get him to enter tournaments at the state level, but he always has some excuse."

"Albert had his picture in the paper five years ago," Mrs. Simpson said proudly.

Simpson cleared his throat. "Didn't have anything to do with archery, though."

"It was at the ground-breaking ceremonies for the new Whittenberger Supermarket," Mrs. Simpson said. "Albert's firm was doing the constructing."

Albert happened to have the clipping handy. It showed three men, one of them applying a foot to the shoulder of a spade. None of them was Albert.

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"He's in the background," Mrs. Simpson said. "Just behind the ropes. Smiling."

"You take a good picture," I said.

Albert blushed and reached for the apricot brandy bottle. "Let's have another."

We spent the evening talking about archery. At nine I glanced at my watch. "I didn't realize it's this late. I've really got to go."

Mrs. Simpson smiled tentatively. "Aren't you going to take any pictures?"

I smiled apologetically. "I just write the stories. If things work out, I'll send a photographer over later. You understand, of course, that just because I write the story, there is no guarantee that it will be published?"

I left, feeling guilty somehow.

I drove on to the Harbor Motel and parked. At precisely nine-thirty, Mrs. Finley appeared in her car with Eldon Tupper. They went to the motel office, as instructed, and registered as man and wife. I watched them walk to one of the units, Eldon carrying an armload of books and papers and Mrs. Finley nervously eyeing the parked cars. They disappeared into unit No. 11.

I duly made a note of the time and place and then drove to the nearest drugstore. I consulted the phone book there for the listing of Thomas G. Carson.

I drove to his address. It proved to be a new four-story apartment building. In the vestibule I checked the names on the mailboxes and found *Mr. & Mrs. Thomas G. Carson*.

Mrs. Carson?

I went up the stairs to the second floor and knocked on door number 203. After a few moments, a man with a neatly-trimmed beard opened the door.

Yes, this was Uncle Charles. He had grown the beard, of course, but there was no mistaking him: the careful humor behind the eyes, the impression of competence.

"Yes?" he asked.

But now that I had found Uncle Charles, I wasn't supposed to talk to him. I was to tell Ariana where she could find him, and that was all.

I dragged up the memory of one of the other names on the mailboxes downstairs. "Mr. Yancey?"

Uncle Charles shook his head. "I'm afraid you have the wrong apartment."

Behind him I heard a television set being turned down and then a woman's voice. "Who is it, Tom?"

"Someone looking for a man named Yancey."

The woman appeared. She was perhaps forty, but slim, and with her, too, one felt an aura of competent intelligence.

She came forward. "Yancey?"

Isn't there a Yancey down at the end of the corridor?"

Uncle Charles shrugged. "I don't know our neighbors that well, Marie."

I smiled. "I'd better go downstairs and check the mailbox numbers again."

Outside the building, I got into my car and began driving home.

Well, that was that. All I had to do now was phone Ariana and tell her where she could find her Uncle Charles. But I thought that could wait a while. There were still a few things bothering me and I wanted to take care of them in the morning.

At my apartment, I set the alarm for seven-thirty and then went to bed.

In the morning after breakfast, I drove back to the Harbor Motel and parked. Eleven minutes later, at precisely eight-thirty, Mrs. Finley and Eldon Tupper opened the door of unit No. 11 and exited. She waved to me as they drove away.

Back in town, I found a client waiting in my outer office. He had bushy red hair, a full mustache, and he blinked fairly often.

I smiled. "I'll be with you in five minutes. I have a little errand to do down the hall."

I went on to Morris Willman's office and found him drinking coffee. "Morris," I said, "I want you to find

out who and what Uncle Charles really is or was."

"Any helpful suggestions about how I accomplish this feat?"

"Phone the main library and get the Reference Room. Ask somebody there to get a copy of *Who's Who in America* and look up Hector Collier."

"Why *Hector Collier*?"

"Because quite often a man's biography will mention the maiden name of the woman he married. I imagine his wife insists upon it—and in this case, the maiden name would be Uncle Charles' last name. Right?"

"Right. But suppose he isn't in *Who's Who*?"

"If he had money, the odds are that he'll be there. For philanthropy, if nothing else. But if he isn't, there ought to be a *Who's Who* of the business world. By the way, you'll have to go back six years or more. That's how long Hector Collier's been deceased."

"That done, what next?"

"Get switched to the Periodical Room and ask for the name of a daily newspaper in the St. Paul-Minneapolis area. Then phone the paper and get the morgue. Tell the man in charge that you're a police reporter and that a man who's been arrested down here on suspicion of arson gives his name as Charles whatever-you-found-out-in-*Who's*-

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Who. You wonder if they've got anything on him up there."

"Why don't I just tell them I'm a private detective?"

"I have the feeling you would meet with resistance. Newspapermen help newspapermen. Any questions?"

"Yes. Why don't you do all of this yourself?"

"Because I have a client waiting in my office and I don't want to keep him waiting half the morning."

Back in my office, I ushered the client to a chair.

He was a small man who seemed to look over his shoulder before he sat down. He cleared his throat. "Do you handle divorce cases?"

"In what way?"

He seemed uneasy. "It's my wife and I. We just don't get along. Incompatibility, you know. And, well, we decided on a divorce."

"Wise under the circumstances," I said. "Wise."

"And I heard, that at times, certain arrangements can be made with some private detectives to . . . well . . . you know that adultery is grounds for divorce and . . ."

I could see that we would deal freely with italics. I reached for a sheet of paper. "Your name, please?"

"Andrew Oliphant."

"Your address?"

"I'm staying at the Alton Hotel."

"Just what is it that you heard about *some* private detectives?"

He shifted in his chair. "Well, I heard that some private detectives will actually *arrange* for the husband to spend the *night* in a hotel room with some woman and then testify in court to that effect."

I nodded thoughtfully. "Perhaps it *would* be possible to arrange something like that."

He was relieved. "Good. I'll pay something in advance. Will one hundred dollars do?"

I carefully studied the red hair, the red mustache, and the blinking eyes. "No," I said finally, "I'd prefer two hundred."

His mouth dropped slightly. "Isn't that a bit *steep*? I mean for an *advance*?"

I smiled. "I prefer a *larger* advance than *most* private detectives. However you must remember that it is *only* an *advance* and comes out of the *final* fee. And my final fee is approximately the same as any *other* detective's final fee. We have our fair practice code, you know."

He mulled that over and sighed. "All right. Two hundred it is." He cleared his throat again. "This woman with whom I am supposed to spend the night? I wouldn't want to harm anyone's *reputation*. I mean, you would provide somebody who wouldn't *mind* the . . .

ah . . . publicity of such a thing?"

"Of course," I said. "Which would you prefer? Blonde? Brunette? Redhead?"

"Well . . . I think *blonde* will be all right."

I got to my feet and went to the door. I locked it.

He was instantly alarmed. "Why did you do that?"

"I don't want anyone to disturb us." I went back to my desk. "I'd like to see your identification. A driver's license will do."

He balked. "I don't think that is necessary."

"In that case, I shall have to phone the police."

Color drained from his face. "The police? What for?"

I gave him a tight smile. "We private detectives have our own little get-togethers and our circulating mimeographs in which we exchange information and lore. So, Mr. Oliphant, or whoever you really are, I am certain that I have heard of you before." I leaned forward. "You pay your *one* hundred dollars *advance* for the *arrangement*. You spend the night with the girl . . . and I mean *spend* . . . and then you disappear. It was never your intention to get any such thing as a divorce. As a matter of fact, I don't believe that you are even married?"

He glanced back at the locked

door and then slowly hung his head. "No."

"Now let me see your wallet."

He meekly handed it over.

I flipped it open and read the name on the driver's license out loud. "Alistair Folling?"

He nodded.

I made a note of his address. "You may take off your wig and mustache now, and put on your glasses. You'll ruin your eyes without them."

When he had done as instructed, I stared at him. He seemed vaguely familiar. I re-read the name. Alistair Folling?

But of course! I was shocked. "You? Alistair Folling? The Book Editor of the *Daily Times*? Indulging in this *carnal* . . ."

His underlip thrust out with a trace of stubbornness. "I'm only human, you know. A man. And a man needs . . ." He frowned. "At least I think he does."

I shook my head sadly. "Why do you find it necessary to go through all this complicated folderol? Couldn't you just take twenty bucks and find the nearest—"

He broke in. "Because basically I'm a very *shy* man. I just *couldn't* simply *approach* anyone; and besides, I don't really *know* any . . ." He shrugged.

We fell into silence, each with his own thoughts.

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"Mr. Folling," I said finally. "I am a humanitarian and I cannot stand to see a fellow human being suffer." I reached for the phone book and turned to the yellow pages. I found the number of Esmeralda's Massage and dialed.

When I hung up, it was all arranged. "Her name is Flora. She'll be in room three-one-eight of the Stafford Arms tonight at eight. Bring along a pint."

"I always do." He seemed considerably happier. "At first, I thought you might try to blackmail me."

I regarded him with new interest.

He paled and endeavored to take the foot out of his mouth.

I smiled aggressively. "Are you on friendly terms with the sportswriters on your newspaper?"

His lip curled faintly. "I have spoken to them on occasion."

"Then, as a favor, I want you to get one of them to go to the Albert Simpson home at two-three-eight-five Windom Avenue. Have him take along a photographer. I want him to write a *big* story on archery, the Archery Club, and *especially* the Simpsons. I want pictures of the *whole* family."

He was dubious. "Suppose they won't do it?"

"Sportswriters inevitably write books, don't they?"

"Inevitably."

"And when these books are writ-

ten, they expect a favorable review from their own newspaper?"

"Of course."

"Then inform the sports staff that if the Simpson story does not appear, you will henceforth assign any books coming from the sports department to a woman reviewer who can't stand Hemingway."

He nodded. "That ought to do it."

At ten o'clock, my phone rang. It was Mrs. Finley. "I saw you this morning, but not last night."

"I was there," I said. "Everything is properly witnessed. I suppose Eldon worked on his Ph.D.?"

"For a while. Then we played cards."

"The rest of the night?"

"Not exactly. Did you know that Eldon sold his *blood* to a blood bank in order to make ends meet when he was working for his Master's?"

"I know," I said. "They don't make them that way anymore."

"Such a scholar," Mrs. Finley said. "So kind and gentle. I'm meeting him later this afternoon."

Twenty minutes later Morris phoned. "We struck pay dirt. Uncle Charles is Charles Neilson, and he's wanted by the police."

"What for?"

"He slugged his parole officer."

"What did he get sent to jail for in the first place?"

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years and then was paroled. Two weeks later he socked the parole officer and wisely disappeared."

"Why in the world would he hit his parole officer?"

"I don't know. According to the clipping read to me over the phone, the parole officer, somebody named Zander, said the attack was 'entirely unprovoked.'"

"This happened in Minnesota?"

"No. Oregon. That's where he served his time. The reason it got any play at all in the St. Paul newspapers is because St. Paul was Neilson's official residence and he also happened to be the brother-in-law of the prominent Hector Collier."

"What was Hector prominent for?"

"He owned a string of pea, corn, and string bean canneries throughout the Midwest. They're still in the family but being run for Mrs. Collier by a bank."

"Why the devil would Charles Neilson be stealing jewels?"

"For a living maybe. His sister was an airline stewardess before she married Hector. Have you got any leads on Neilson yet?"

I hesitated. "No. Nothing at all yet."

When he hung up, I drummed my fingers on the desk. So Uncle Charles was wanted by the police? Then why did he go around winning archery tournaments and risk

exposure and then a prison cell?

After a little thinking I worked it out. Just how much was he really risking by entering regional tournaments? Not much. After all, he wasn't exactly on the F.B.I.'s most-wanted list. Outside of Oregon and Minnesota, probably no one knew about him or his troubles. Raising the beard and putting distance between him and those two states made him about as safe as a man can be. He could indulge in his hobby with near impunity, as long as he kept it low-key.

Ariana showed up at two-thirty in the afternoon.

"You lied to me," I said immediately.

Her honest violet eyes veiled. "In what possible way?"

"You did not mention that your Uncle Charles is a jewel thief and former convict and that at this moment he is wanted by the police."

She stared at me for a while and then gave up. "How did you find that out?"

"I have agents," I said. "Informers; connections; people who owe me favors. You also neglected to mention that your father has been dead six years and therefore could not possibly have had that quarrel with Uncle Charles three years ago."

She acknowledged the discrepancy and volunteered further

information. "Actually, Uncle Charles wasn't just a *jewel* thief. He preferred cash. But hardly anybody keeps cash in his safe anymore, so Uncle Charles had to settle for whatever he could find."

"Why did he have to steal? Couldn't his brother-in-law have gotten him a decent job?"

"Uncle Charles is an independent kind of man. Besides, he'd been a thief all his life, though none of us knew it until he got caught." She sighed. "Mother and I were so positive he would go straight after leaving prison, because of the letters he sent us while he was there. He'd never served time before and the experience made quite an impression on him. But then he had to go and hit that parole officer."

"Why would he do that?"

"I don't know. Uncle Charles never communicated with us after he disappeared, except for the Christmas cards. I guess he didn't want to get us into trouble by corresponding with him and the cards were his way of telling us that he was all right and not to worry."

"Now you want to find him? Why?"

"Because of my mother. She intends to marry Randall Clay and I think she shouldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I believe he's just a fortune hunter. He doesn't *really* care

for her at all. It's not possible."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because he made his . . . *play* . . . for me first. Clay is at least twenty-five years older than I am and I really don't know why he did it unless he's just terribly self-confident. Anyway, when he found out that I regarded him as at least one generation removed, he simply switched his attentions to my mother."

"That made you jealous?"

She regarded me coldly. "No."

"What does Uncle Charles have to do with all of this?"

"I've *tried* to convince mother that Clay is just after her money, but she simply won't listen. I thought that if I could get Uncle Charles to talk to her, it might turn the trick. They were always very close."

"Why didn't you tell me all of this in the first place?"

"I thought it was really none of your business. I mean, it's family and you were a complete stranger. I just wanted you to find Uncle Charles. Have you any idea yet where he might be?"

I looked out of the window. "I have a few leads, but it will take a few days to track them down." I turned back to her. "Did it ever occur to you to hire a private detective to check up on Randall Clay?"

"As a matter of fact, I *did*. The

Belmont Detective Agency in St. Paul. Mr. Belmont did a 'run', as he called it, on Randall Clay."

"What did he find?"

"Nothing. At least nothing *bad*. He found that Clay was exactly what he said he was: from a prominent New Orleans family, had an adequate income from stocks, and like that."

"But you still don't trust him?"

"No. It's just *instinct*."

I reached for my desk pen. "Do you know his address and telephone number?"

"All I know is that he's at the Oakland Hotel in St. Paul."

She watched me write that down. "How did you ever get into this business?"

"From my mother."

"Oh?"

"Actually my father founded the agency, but he died when I was quite young. The lease on his office still had four months to go at the time, so mother said, 'Oh, what the hell,' and she began answering the phone. One thing led to another until she decided to get a license. She's on vacation in California right now." I put the pen back in its stand. "It just occurred to me that being alone in a strange city can get boring. How about dinner tonight and a show? I happen to have two tickets to *Son of the Student Prince*."

After a moment she nodded. "All right. Actually I am very seldom bored, but I do get hungry and I've heard of the play."

"I'll pick you up in the lobby of your hotel at seven. Stanton Arms, isn't it?"

She paused at the door. "How did you know that?"

"Agents," I said again. "Informers; connections; people who owe me favors."

When she was gone, I dialed Manfred Haggerty. He promised to search his soul and the city for a pair of tickets to *Son of the Student Prince*, and they would cost me only thirty-four dollars.

When I hung up, I sat in my chair for a while, thinking, and then I reached for the phone again. I got the long-distance operator and had her connect me with the Better Business Bureau in St. Paul.

A man answered. "Better Business Bureau."

"I'm thinking of employing the Belmont Detective Agency on a plant security matter, but first I thought it wouldn't harm to check with you about its reliability."

He agreed. "Just a moment. I'll have someone look in our files and see if there's anything."

A minute later he was back on the phone. "Hm," he said thoughtfully.

I waited.

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“We have had three identical complaints against the Belmont Detective Agency in the last four years.”

“What were they about?”

“The complainants maintained that Mr. Belmont, who is the Belmont Detective Agency, approached them and informed them that he had been hired to investigate them. He then offered to give them a ‘clean bill of health,’ as he put it, if they would hand him two hundred dollars.”

“What was done about it?”

“Each time Mr. Belmont categorically denied making the offers, and since there was no proof of the offers other than the word of the complainants, we just put the items in our files and that is where they rest.”

“Did Belmont tell them why they were being investigated?”

“Yes. In two of the cases, husbands wanted their wives followed to see what they were up to. In the other case, it was just the reverse.”

I thanked him and hung up.

According to our accepted principles of justice, a man is innocent until proven guilty. However, I preferred to make an exception in this case.

I judged Belmont guilty and even multiplied his offenses by five, under the assumption that the complainants represented only a frac-

tion of those approached by Belmont. The great majority had either refused to pay and did not bother to go to the Better Business Bureau, or had simply paid for their ‘clean bill of health.’

I further reasoned that when Ariana had gone to Belmont for a check on Randall Clay, Belmont had merely approached Clay with an offer to transmit a favorable report, and Clay had accepted.

It was hypothesis, of course, but confident hypothesis.

I reached for the phone and got the long-distance operator. “I’d like to make a call to a Mr. Randall Clay at the Oakland Hotel in St. Paul. I’m sorry, but I can’t find his number at the moment.”

After a while, a man answered. “Hello?”

“Are you Randall Clay?”

“Yes.”

“I am a former employee of the Belmont Detective Agency,” I said.

There was caution in his voice. “Yes?”

“I have acquired some interesting information concerning your past.”

His voice was cold. “My past? I’ve already made suitable arrangements with Mr. Belmont on that matter.”

I laughed significantly. “But you haven’t made any arrangements with me, and, as I said, I am a for-

mer employee of the Belmont Detective Agency."

"Just what is this 'information' which you claim to possess?"

"Oh, come now, Mr. Clay. You don't expect me to repeat it over the phone? Suffice it to say that if I relay it to the proper people, it could change the rest of your life considerably. *Very* considerably."

"What the devil do you want? Money?"

"Perhaps. But mostly I want to meet you. You have time to catch the evening train or take a plane and be here by morning. At exactly twelve noon I want you standing on the northeast corner of Sixth and Vermont. You will remain standing there until I approach you, which will be within the hour."

"Of all the ridiculous . . ." He paused. "Where are you calling from?"

I gave him the city, but not the number.

"Why do we need to meet in such a public place?"

"I am a cautious man, Mr. Clay."

I suddenly realized that I hadn't the faintest idea of what Randall Clay looked like. "You will wear a white carnation in your lapel," I said, "and carry a cane."

"I don't have a cane."

"Then get one. It doesn't have to be expensive. An ordinary rattan will do." I hung up.

Well, that was that. Either he'd show up tomorrow or he wouldn't.

I picked Ariana up at seven. We had dinner and then took in the play. During the Rathskeller scene in the third act, the audience was invited to take off its clothes. Seventeen women and one scrawny young man did.

When I took Ariana back to her hotel, we said good night at the elevators.

At eleven-thirty the next morning, I was in the coffee shop of my office building watching the northeast corner of Sixth and Vermont.

At five to twelve, a tall man, graying at the temples, appeared at the corner. He wore a white carnation in his lapel and he carried a cane.

He waited.

At five after twelve, I went to the public phone booth. I looked up the number and dialed Police Headquarters. I asked to be switched to someone on the Bomb Squad.

A voice identified itself as Sergeant Moody.

"Do you have a pencil and paper?" I asked.

"I always have a pencil and paper."

"Then take down this name. Randall Clay."

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northeast corner of Sixth and Vermont. He has a carnation in his lapel and he is carrying a rattan walking stick."

"What am I supposed to do about that?"

"He can tell you a great deal about the bombings at the university last month. A *great* deal."

"Who is this calling?" he demanded.

"Let us say that I am a concerned citizen." I hung up.

I found my hands slightly damp and wiped them with a handkerchief. I suppose I could have said that Clay was wanted for theft or rape, but bombing seems to be the In thing nowadays and I thought that it would get the immediate and undivided attention of the police. They would probably hold him long enough for a thorough investigation into his past.

I went back to the coffee shop and waited.

Six minutes later an unmarked car containing two men pulled up at the northeast corner of Sixth and Vermont. They stepped out and approached Clay. They showed him their wallets.

Clay's lips moved in protest, but one of the men put his hand on Clay's elbow and led him to the car. It pulled away.

I went back up to my office and started worrying about Uncle

Charles, but results totaled zero.

Finally I sighed and picked up the phone. I talked to the long-distance operator. "I'd like to place a call to a Mr. Zander of the Oregon State Parole Board. I believe it's located in the capitol or administration building in Salem. I've misplaced the number."

"Is that the official designation?" she asked. "Oregon State Parole Board?"

"Yes," I said, and then I acted uncertain. "At least I *think* it is. I've got Zander's letter here somewhere but I just can't put my finger on it at the moment. Secretary's on vacation, you know. Anyway, it's the Oregon State Parole Board or something close to that, and I'm pretty sure it's in Salem. Or possibly Portland?"

After about five minutes of negotiations between long-distance operators, I was connected with a Mr. Hendricks who held a responsible position in matters relating to parole.

"Do you have a parole officer named Zander?" I asked.

"Oh?" he said. "You a friend of his?"

From the tone of his voice, I immediately gathered that it might not exactly be upward to be a friend of Zander's.

"By no means," I said. "I'm with Delta Collections. Could I speak to

Mr. Zander for a moment now?"

"Delta Collections? Well, well. And you want to speak to him?"

"If I could."

He seemed to chuckle. "I guess you could, all right. On visiting day. He's an inmate in the state prison."

I was properly shocked. "A parole officer in jail? How could that happen?"

"He was put away on half a dozen charges, including blackmail of the parolees in his charge, juggling of department funds, moral turpitude, and what have you."

"Blackmailing parolees?"

"That's right. By threatening to report that they violated their paroles unless they paid up."

I became obviously outraged. "Someone should have slugged him."

"Someone did."

"Really?"

"An ex-con named Neilson. I guess Zander tried to blackmail the wrong man. Neilson blackened one of Zander's eyes and knocked out three teeth."

"I suppose that put poor Neilson back in jail?"

"No. He just plain disappeared. Probably figured that it was his word against that of a parole officer and he didn't stand a chance. Haven't seen hide nor hair of him since."

"When you do find Neilson, he

goes back to a jail cell at once?"

"For slugging Zander? Hell, no. At the time, maybe, but not with what we know about Zander now."

"So there's nothing outstanding against Neilson?"

"Nothing. Unless maybe we charge him with theft."

"Theft?"

He chuckled again. "For stealing a state employee. Marie Brennan was her name. She was the chief veterinarian at the state prison farm where Neilson served most of his time. They got pretty well acquainted while he was there and I heard they were planning to get married. The day after Neilson disappeared, she resigned her job and disappeared. I have the hunch that if we ever find Neilson, we'll also find her."

I had that hunch myself. "Well, I guess Delta Collections can kiss off Zander?"

"I guess so," Hendricks said.

I hung up.

So Uncle Charles didn't have to hide, but he didn't know it yet. I could see where the jailing of a parole officer in Oregon wasn't too likely to make the papers here or in Minnesota.

Now he could shave off that beard if he wanted to and enter state archery tournaments and get his picture in the newspapers.

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phone him and tell him the good news. I would tell Ariana first and let her pass it on to Neilson. Besides, it gave me an excuse for seeing her again tonight.

When I got to my apartment after five-thirty that afternoon, my daily newspaper lay before the door as usual.

I picked it up and stared at the front-page picture of Randall Clay.

The explaining columns were liberally sprinkled with 'allegeds', but they did convey the information that Randall Clay had been married at least five times previously, each time under another name, and it also appeared that all of those wives had mysteriously disappeared after withdrawing their savings from their banks.

Clay's fingerprints had been picked up in the residences of his

previous wives and had been on national file. His photograph had also been identified by a number of grieving in-laws.

My phone rang.

I quickly unlocked my apartment door and picked up the receiver.

It was Ariana and she was quite excited. "Did you see this evening's paper?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, I did."

"What in the world made Clay come down here?"

I wanted to tell her about Clay, and about Uncle Charles, and I wanted to ask her if she thought a private detective who specialized in messy divorce cases could make a living in St. Paul. But there are some things you just cannot handle properly by phone.

"I'll be over in ten minutes," I said, and hung up.



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